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# Various Departments Reflect On the Decision to Hold Classes In-person

Nicole Alejandra Hong, Staff Reporter

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many classes throughout the 2020-21 academic year were forced to be held remotely in order to abide by safety protocols. However, there were a few exceptions to that rule.

Pj Alaimo, the chair of the Chemistry Department, spoke on the decision to hold certain class sections in-person during winter and spring quarter.

“In the fall, we were completely remote but by winter and spring quarter you could tell there were many students, as well as faculty, who were eager to get back into the classroom. I wanted to find a way to give them that option provided it was safe,” Alaimo said.

Alaimo organized a matchmaking process to bring this possibility to life. Through careful planning and surveys, Alaimo determined which faculty members and students were comfortable and capable of being in a physical classroom setting.

Alaimo expressed his gratitude for the rigid nature of science students’ schedules in planning in-person and remote classes.

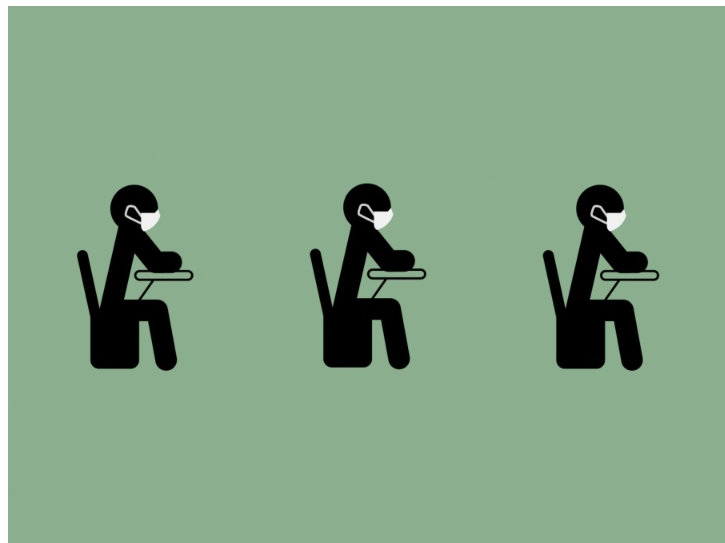
“In a sense it’s easy to be a science chair, because student’s course schedules are very predictable, which makes it possible to have this matchmaking process and set up in-person classes. Whereas other departments, like humanities, would likely find it impossible to try to coordinate something like this,” Alaimo said.

The Honors Program also made the move to in-person learning for select classes. Dean Peterson, an associate economics professor, taught “Evolution of Economics” during winter quarter. The class consisted of 25 students and was held in Pigott auditorium to allow for sufficient space for social distancing.

Peterson expressed his astonishment and relief at finally being able to teach in-person.

“I was so excited to be able to use a white board and have a true exchange with students. I could bring handouts to class and we could work on tactile things rather than just staring at each other on a screen. The difference between teaching in-person and online is like night and day to me,” Peterson said.

Although Peterson was thrilled to be back in the classroom, he did not truly realize the importance of in-person learning for students until the first day back.



Kim Nucum

“What soon became apparent to me was that it wasn’t about what I was going to teach, it was about the students getting back together in a room as a cohort. They had started their studies together in the fall of last year and hadn’t seen each other since the end of winter quarter when the pandemic started,” Peterson said.

In order to be able to teach in-person, Peterson had to follow slightly different procedures than the matchmaking process that Alaimo organized for the Chemistry Department.

“We had to go through a process in order to be granted permission to hold classes in-person. My personal living situation had to be fit for in-person teaching. However, there also had to be a unanimous decision amongst students to be in-person, everyone had to be fully vaccinated and classes had to be small enough that we could socially distance in a large classroom,” Peterson said.

As for which classes can be expected to look like in the fall of 2021, Alaimo spoke with confidence about the decision to return to in-person learning and shared his excitement about being able to conduct classes in the new Jim and Janet Sinegal Center for Science and Innovation.

“As of now, the Chemistry Department plans to be 100% in-person in the fall. When students begin registering for classes, they will be able to see building and classroom numbers assigned to each section. Returning to in-person will be especially exciting for science students because they will have the opportunity to begin utilizing state of the art equipment in the new science building,” Alaimo said.

Rick Malleus, the chair of the Communications and Media Department, shared the department’s plans for classes that will be conducted in the fall.

“I am excited to announce that over half of the communications classes will be offered in-person in the fall. We did a lot of careful planning and made sure to abide by the College of Arts & Sciences guidelines for planning the fall course schedule. We also made sure to prioritize instructors’ personal situations and preferences when deciding which courses could be offered in-person,” Malleus said.

As plans for the fall become solidified, Alaimo shared his hopes for the return to in-person teaching and learning.

“I hope that we, as a humanity, do not move forward with all the loss and all the tragedy we’ve experienced and not learn some good things. We’ve all been through the ringer, but there are some little nuggets of positivity that we can and should take with us from this experience,” Alaimo said.

In order for students to return to the Seattle U campus in the fall, they must be fully vaccinated. With registration quickly approaching, students will need to examine which classes work best for them as the university transitions from remote to in-person.